



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of HENRY A. (HANK) COLE, Jr.

1921 – 2023 Started modeling in the mid-1930



Written by MA staff (2010); Updated by JS (04/2021, 03/2023)

Career:

- 1938: Won second place in the Tacoma News Tribune model airplane contest; Joined the Tacoma Gas Wings
- 1946-1949, 1951, 1955, 1958-1959, 1967, 1980, 1984, 1993: Placed well in the AMA Nats (first through third places)
- 1947: Held the A Speed National Record
- 1948, 1955, 1981-1991-92, 2001, 2004-05, 2007: Place in first in Western regional contests
- 1957, 1962: Held the Nordic National Record
- 1959: Held the Wakefield National Record
- Several of his airplanes, including the Smoothie and Stratosphere, were published in modeling magazines.

Honors:

- 1959: AMA Fellow
- 1980: NFFS Hall of Fame Inductee
- 2005: SAM Hall of Fame Inductee
- 2009: AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame Inductee

The following biography was written by AMA staff for the January 2010 issue of Model Aviation magazine, part of the article “Model Aviation Hall of Fame Class of 2009”. This and other Model Aviation issues can be read online in the Model Aviation Digital Library at <http://library.modelaviation.com/ma/>.

Henry “Hank” Cole

Henry Cole’s fascination for flying models began in the mid 1930s, when he built a rubber-powered Cabin model by Frank Zaic from plans in *Popular Mechanics*. The model flew well and Hank was soon known as “that crazy kid down the block whose airplane was landing on top of houses and in backyards.”

In 1938, the Tacoma Public Schools and the *Tacoma News Tribune* in Tacoma, Washington, sponsored a contest at Mueller Harkins airport. At the contest, he placed second and met Chuck Hollinger, who ran a model shop, and other model builders who belonged to a club called the Tacoma Gas Wings.

Hank spent much time at the library reading NACA (National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics) reports, which led him to his first original design: a larger-than-usual, hand-launch

glider with swept-back tips. This model won the 1939 TNT contest and others. The plans were published in 1946.

In 1940, five Tacoma Gas Wings members drove 2,000 miles to the Chicago Nationals. There they met modelers such as Frank Zaic, Bill Winter, Carl Goldberg, Sal Taibi, Dick Korda, Chet Lanzo, and Walt Good. Hank flew his original-design, rubber-powered Cabin model Stratosphere, which was published in *Model Airplane News*, June 1941.

Hank and Chuck Hollinger attended the 1941 Nats and had two more models accepted for publication. Hank's Smoothie has many fans around the world even today. The three-view plans, drawn by Douglas Rolfe, were a work of art. The plans have also been drawn by Jim O'Reilly, and a kit was produced by Bob Holman.

In 1942, Hank was studying aeronautical engineering at the University of Washington and working part-time in the wind tunnel project. The Davis airfoil, used on the Liberator in World War II, came in for a test. Hank found that the airfoil was generated by a set of equations from which all kinds of airfoils could be defined. From these he selected five airfoils suitable for models and they were published in *Air Trails*, May 1942. The Davis 3 has been widely used on F1B aircraft and the Davis 5 on gas models.

Hank started experimenting with flying wings and used equations to generate a stable airfoil that worked well on a hi-start model. He designed and flew an Ohlsson .23-powered pusher gas model called the Dry Duck. The engine could not be dunked even when it flipped upside down.

World War II suspended Hank's FF activities, but the Navy allowed him to complete his degree before sending him to the South Pacific on an aircraft carrier. The work Henry did in 1942 was published in *Air Trails* and *Air Trails Model Annual* in 1944.

While Hank was on the aircraft carrier, he built an Elf-powered flying wing CL model. As construction progressed, the pilots on the ship were divided about whether or not it would fly. When it was finished Hank and some of the pilots took it out on one of the islands and cranked it up. It took about a half circle to get off, but it did fly. When he landed it, Hank noticed that money was changing hands among the pilots.

After the war Hank was assigned to Alameda Naval Air Station. He joined the East Bay Aeroneers and became friends with Don Foote and Bud Romak. Hank built a gas model, the Asymmetrical Pusher, which he flew in a contest and came in second to Don's Westerner.

Meanwhile, Chuck Hollinger was getting a model shop going in Seattle, which he and Henry planned to run upon Hank's release from the Navy.

While still in the Bay Area, Hank bought kits from distributors in San Francisco for the shop. On May 1, 1946, he headed to Seattle but stayed in contact with Don Foote for many years.

Hank and Chuck opened Aero-Craft Model Shop in Seattle. The pair custom-cut balsa and helped customers start engines and fly their airplanes. As the aircraft industry started to recover

following the war, they closed the shop and moved on to better opportunities. Hank returned to college to obtain a master's degree in aeronautical engineering.

Hank reported many memorable moments during his model aviation career including his first Nationals win in Dallas where Arthur Godfrey presented him with the Mulvihill trophy. Another unforgettable experience was in 1955 when he made the U.S. Nordic Team and traveled to Germany.

Hank held records in A Speed, Nordic, and Wakefield. He was elevated to AMA Fellow in 1959 and inducted into the National Free Flight Society and Society of Antique Modelers halls of fame.

Hank Cole's autobiographical writing, My Sixty Years of Model Flying, is housed in the AMA History Project files at the National Model Aviation Museum.

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